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NEWS

FROM YOUR MUSEUM

THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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PROFESSOR PARSONS RETIRES—DR. MEEN MADE DIRECTOR

Professor A. L. Parsons has retired as Director of the Royal Ontario Museum of Mineralogy. Professor Parsons, a well-known authority in the science of minerals, has served the museum for the past twenty-four years. He has been designated Director Emeritus by the Board of Trustees and Dr. V. B. Meen has been appointed Director.

NOW IS THE TIME EGYPTIANS CELEBRATED THEIR NEW YEAR

Although we celebrate the New Year in mid-winter, mankind has not always done so, according to Egyptologists of the Royal Ontario Museum. About 5000 years ago the Egyptians invented a calendar which began on a day corresponding to our July 19th. Their years had 365 days, divided into 12 months of 30 days, with 5 extra festival days at the end of the year. They had 3 seasons of 4 months each: inundation, winter, and summer. Their New Year's Day, called the "opening of the year," was the first day of the first month of inundation.

The endless fertility of the Nile Valley was caused by the annual flooding of the river, which gave water and rich fertilizing deposits to the fields. The Egyptians' choice of a New Year's Day was therefore a compelling one. Unfortunately, since they had no leap year, their year slipped back a day every four years, and in the course of centuries the "opening of the year" occurred at less appropriate times.

Like many modern peoples, the ancient Egyptians gave New Year's gifts. The Royal Ontario Museum possesses three dainty flasks of glazed ware manufactured especially for this purpose. One of them bears the inscription "May the god Ptah and the goddess Sekhmet open a happy year for its lord."

MANY SWALLOWS MAKE AN AUTUMN

It is not our purpose to be gloomy but have you noticed swallows flocking along the country roads? Hundreds of them dot the strands of telephone wire appearing like quarter notes on the musical staff. This means that summer is on the wane. To us humans it doesn't seem long since these birds were harbingers of spring. Now they are harbingers of autumn. To swallows, perhaps it seems a long time since they arrived here. In the interval, between spring and now, they have established their homes, built their nests, incubated their eggs, and reared their families. Incidentally, they have swept myriads of insects from the air. Now their work is done. They can gather in family groups and neighbourhood assemblages to loaf awhile before flying southward.

Of course, we have been thinking about swallows in general. Actually there are a half dozen different kinds native to Ontario. Reference to exhibits in the Royal Ontario Museum will show these to be—the tree swallow, bank swallow, rough-winged swallow, barn swallow, cliff swallow and purple martin. Most of these spend the winter in southern countries, from Mexico to South America.

TREASURE-HUNTERS, ATTENTION!

Perhaps you think that digging up treasure can't be done in Toronto. You are wrong. A workman busy by the Bloor Viaduct recently pulled a shining medal out of the earth. It shows King George the Fourth in his splendid wig on the occasion of his coronation in 1821. On the reverse side is a harbor busy with ships—the ships that were bringing our ancestors to Canada.

Perhaps one of them had tucked it in his pocket and brought it out here to lose it stalking deer above the wild ravine. The Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology can't tell you that, but it can tell you what treasure you have found if you will bring it in.

HOW SMALL YOUR FEET ARE, GRANDMOTHER!

Visitors to the costume gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum are usually amazed at the small size of most of the old shoes. Certainly many of the white kid boots and silk slippers that were worn in grandmother's time are surprisingly tiny. In those days feet were not supposed to be seen, but when the crinoline did swing out giving a fleeting glance, the smaller the foot was, the more alluring it was considered.

Girls in the 19th century were definitely smaller in every way than they are today and they did not develop their feet by taking part in active sports. Also, probably grandmother suffered considerably from tight shoes, in order to attain the tiny foot that was such a mark of beauty in her time.

NATURE'S RECIPE FOR VEGETABLES A SECRET

No minerals—no soil! No soil—no vegetables! No vegetables—no victory!

Now that the vegetables (and weeds) are growing so rapidly in our Victory Gardens, your reporter became curious concerning the minerals which make up the soil. Upon enquiry at the Royal Ontario Museum, he learned that, while soil is made up of the commonest minerals, the roles which these play in promoting plant growth are not very well known. Good soil should contain some of the clay minerals, but plant growth is not luxuriant on china clay alone. The principal function of the clay is to absorb and hold moisture. It is known that certain mineral species (zeolites) absorb and give up some of the chemicals that are necessary for plant growth. Along with these minerals is a certain amout of decayed vegetable matter which serves as plant food and an absorbent of moisture. The Museum does not exhibit these minerals as they appear in the soil but many fine specimens of clay minerals—zeolites, quartz, and feldspar—are on display in its galleries. Your reporter became intrigued with thoughts of how Old Mother Nature produced these minerals, broke them into billions of particles and thoroughly mixed them together, a pinch of this and a dash of that, just the proper amount so that vegetables (and weeds) might grow.